



HORRORS

OF

WEST INDIA SLAVERY.

DURING the Session of 1804, the following extract of a letter from Lord SEAFORTH, the Governor of Barbadoes, to Lord HOBART, dated at Barbadoes, the 18th of March, 1802, was laid on the table of the House of Commons. "Your Lordship will observe, in the ' day's proceedings of the Assembly, that *the majority of the house had taken considerable offence at a message of mine, recommending an act to be passed to make the murder of a slave felony. At present the fine for the crime is only fifteen pounds currency, or ELEVEN POUNDS FOUR SHILLINGS STERLING.*"

People in general would think it scarcely possible that a stronger proof could be adduced of the deplorably unprotected condition in which the Negroes are placed in Barbadoes, the oldest and most civilized of our Slave Colonies, than was furnished in the above official document. In a community where even the *life* of a Negro Slave is valued at so cheap a rate, it would argue an utter ignorance of the nature of man, and of the principles by which his conduct is usually regulated, to expect that the general treatment of Negro Slaves should be humane and lenient. This might have been alleged was merely presumption; presumption, however, sufficiently strong to remove all doubt from unprejudiced minds: but we are now relieved from that objection. We are no longer reduced to the necessity of making use of disputable analogies, in order, from the state of the laws respecting Slavery, to infer the probable practice; but we have that practice so graphically described, as to supersede the necessity of argumentation, and to silence the most determined stickler for West Indian humanity.

On the 25th of February last, a number of papers, respecting the Slave Trade, were presented to the House of Commons by his Majesty, and they have since been printed. In perusing them the attention is forcibly attracted by a continuation of the correspondence between Lord SEAFORTH and the Secretary of State. On the 13th of November, 1804, his Lordship thus writes to Earl Camden.

"I inclose four papers containing, from different quarters, reports on the horrid murders I mentioned in some former letters. *They are selected from a great number, among which there is not one in contradiction of the horrible facts, though several of the letters are very concise and defective. The truth is, that nothing has given me more trouble than to get at the bottom of these businesses, so horribly absurd are the prejudices of the people,*" (not of one or two, or of a few individuals, but of the PEOPLE.) "However, a great part of my object is answered by the alarm my interference has excited, and the attention it has called to the business. Bills are already prepared to make murder felony*; *but I fear they will be thrown out for the present in the Assembly. The Council are unanimous on the side of humanity.*"

In a subsequent letter, dated the 7th of January, 1805, Lord SEAFORTH thus writes—"I inclose the Attorney General's letter to me on the subject of the Negroes so most wantonly murdered. I am sorry to say SEVERAL OTHER INSTANCES OF THE SAME BARBARITY have occurred, with which I have not troubled your Lordship, as *I only wished to make you acquainted with the subject in general.*"

The letters to which Lord SEAFORTH refers, and which accompany the above extracts, are from four of the most respectable individuals in the Island of

* What a strange state of society must that be in which murder is not yet considered as a felonious act, nay, in which the attempt to make it felony is resisted, not by the lawless part of the community, but by the legislature itself.

Barbadoes, viz. Mr. INCE, *the President of the Council*; Mr. COULTHURST, *the Advocate General*; Mr. BECCLES, *the Attorney General*; and the Reverend Mr. PILGRIM. These gentlemen all agree in the material facts of the cases which they state. It would, therefore, be an unnecessary repetition to transcribe the whole of their letters: it will be sufficient to give the substance of the statements which they contain.

1. On the 10th of April, 1804, a militia man of the name of HALLS, of the St. Michael's regiment, returning from military duty, overtook on the road some Negroes who were going quietly home from their labour. When he came near he called out that he would kill them, and immediately began to run after them. The Negroes not supposing that he really intended to do them any injury, and imagining that he was in joke, did not endeavour to escape, but merely made way for him. The person nearest to him happened to be a woman, the property of a Mr. Clarke, the owner of Simmons's estate, who is stated to have been a valuable Slave, the mother of five or six children, and far advanced in pregnancy. *Without the smallest provocation of any kind, HALLS coolly and deliberately plunged his bayonet several times into her body, when the poor creature dropped and expired without a groan.* Two gentlemen were eye witnesses of this horrid action. One of them, Mr. HARDING, the manager of the Codrington College estate, went up to HALLS and spoke harshly to him, and said he ought to be hanged, for he never saw a more unprovoked murder, and that he would certainly carry him before a magistrate. Hall's reply is very remarkable. "*For what?*" said he, (with the utmost indifference as to the crime) "*for what? FOR KILLING A NEGRO!!!*" This is a short but a significant sentence; strongly confirming an important truth which has frequently been asserted, viz. that the Negroes are

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regarded by their white skinned oppressors as an inferior order of beings, and, under the influence of this sentiment, are naturally enough denied the common rights of humanity, and excluded from the pale of that sympathy, which a sense of a common nature and a common extraction is calculated to inspire. Mr. HARDING, however, greatly to his credit, was proof against the force of HALL's compendious reasoning, and having procured assistance laid hold of him, and carried him before Mr. Justice WALTON. Mr. Justice WALTON, it would appear, was not indisposed to use the authority with which he was vested in bringing HALLS to justice, but he found, that, "*in his situation as a magistrate, the law of the island gave him no jurisdiction or authority over him,*" and, in short, that he had no right to commit him. In this dilemma, Mr. WALTON applied to Mr. President INCE. "I told Mr. WALTON," says the President in his letter to Lord Seaforth, "that I regretted, with real concern, the deficiency in our law; but that there was a penalty due to the King in such cases," (viz, the ELEVEN POUNDS FOUR SHILLINGS mentioned above,) "and that, as Mr. Harding had sufficiently substantiated the fact, I would order him to be committed till he paid the forfeiture, or a suit should be commenced against him." Accordingly he was sent to prison. The President, however, seems to admit the illegality of this proceeding. "Perhaps, my Lord," he adds, "it was a stretch of power in me to order commitment before a recovery of the fine." It certainly was so: and HALLS, without doubt, is sufficiently apprized of the circumstance. Nay, we shall not be surprised to hear that he has been able to rouse the popular feeling in his favour, as a man unjustly and illegally oppressed. To have suffered so severe a punishment as imprisonment, for so paltry an offence as that of killing a negro, will be likely enough to excite no small degree of

virtuous indignation among the Barbadians; and the danger lest such an unauthorized restriction of the freedom of individuals should grow into a precedent, will, of course, call forth the most vigorous resistance. We are justified in forming this expectation by what occurred some years ago, on a similar occasion, in the neighbouring island of St. Kitt's, where the prosecution of a man of the name of Herbert, who had used one of his slaves with the most wanton barbarity, was not only not attended with any punishment to the offender, though the facts were clearly proved; but was likely to have been followed by the most inconvenient and injurious effects to the prosecutor, in consequence of the popular clamour which was excited against him.

2. The second instance produced by Lord SEAFORTH is not inferior in atrocity to the first. A Mr. COLBECK, who lives overseer on Cabbage-tree Plantation, in St. Lucy's parish, "*had bought a new Negro Boy out of the yard,*" (meaning the Slave Yard where Negroes are exposed to sale, in the same manner as the cattle and sheep in Smithfield market,) and carried him home. Conceiving a liking to the boy, he took him into the house and made him wait at table. Mr. CRONE, the overseer of Rowe's estate, which is near to Cabbage-tree Plantation, was in the habit of visiting Mr. COLBECK, *had noticed the boy, and knew him well.* A fire happening one night in the neighbourhood, COLBECK went to give his assistance, and the boy followed him. COLBECK, on his return home, missed the boy, who had lost his way, and as he did not make his appearance the next day, he sent round to his neighbours, and *particularly to CRONE,* informing them that his African lad had strayed, that *he could not speak a word of English,* and possibly he might be found breaking some sugar canes, or taking something else for his support: in which

case he requested they would not injure him, but send him home, and he would pay any damage the boy might have committed. After a lapse of two or three days, the poor creature was discovered in a gully (or deep water course) near to Rowe's estate; and a number of Negroes were soon assembled about the place. The boy naturally terrified with the threats, the noise, and the appearance of so many people, retreated into a hole in a rock, having a stone in his hand for the purpose, probably, of defence. By this time CRONE, and some other white persons, had come up. *By their orders a fire was put to the hole where the boy lay, who, when he began to be scorched, ran from his hiding place into a pool of water which was near.* Some of the Negroes pursued him into the pool; and the boy, it is said, throw the stone which he held in his hand at one of them. On this, two of the white men, CRONE and HOLLINGSWORTH, fired at the boy several times with shot, and the Negroes pelted him with stones. He was at length dragged out of the pool in a dying condition; for he had not only received several bruises from the stones, but his breast was so pierced with the shot that it was like a cullender. The white savages, (this is the language of Mr. ATTORNEY GENERAL BECCLES) ordered the Negroes to dig a grave. *Whilst they were digging it, the poor creature made signs of begging for water, which was not given to him: but as soon as the grave was dug, he was thrown into it and covered over, and, as is believed, WHILE YET ALIVE.* COLBECK, the owner of the boy, hearing that a Negro had been killed, went to CRONE to inquire into the truth of the report. CRONE told him that a Negro had been killed and buried, but assured him it was not his, for he knew him well, and he need not be at the trouble of opening the grave. On this COLBECK went away SATISFIED. Receiving, however, further information, he returned and had the grave

opened, when he found the murdered Negro to be his own. COLBECK brought his action of damages in the courts of the island against CRONE and HOLLINGSWORTH. The cause was ready to be tried, and the court had met for the purpose, when they thought proper to pay double the value of the boy, and £25. for the use of the island, (being £5. less than the penalty fixed by law of £15. currency each), rather than suffer the business to go to a hearing. "This, I am truly sorry to say," observes the Advocate General, "*was the only punishment which could be inflicted for so barbarous and atrocious a crime.*"

This horrid recital (which is given almost in the words of the report, merely avoiding repetitions) seems to require little comment. One circumstance of it, however, may not strike the minds of some readers with its due force, although it appears to be the most affecting part of the whole case. Colbeck, it is said, on hearing that it was not his Slave who had been murdered, WENT AWAY SATISFIED. O most opprobrious satisfaction! The preceding part of the narrative had prepared us to expect in Colbeck some approximation to European feeling. But what is the fact? On being coolly told that a Negro had been killed and buried—told so by his neighbour, the murderer: is he shocked? Does he express any horror or indignation on the occasion? No! he goes away *satisfied!!* Let the reader give its due weight to this one circumstance, and he will be convinced, that a state of society must exist in the West Indies, of which, as an inhabitant of this happy island, he can scarcely form any adequate conception. Suppose, instead of a Negro Slave, that it had been a horse which had been thus killed. COLBECK, had his horse happened to be missing at the time, would have pursued exactly the same steps, and would have been affected in the same way as in the present instance. We may also learn,

from this impressive circumstance, the value of West Indian testimony when given in favour of West Indian humanity. The moral perceptions and feelings which prevail in that quarter of the world, it will be perceived, are wholly different from those on this side of the Atlantic. It may be allowed that these men mean what they say, when they give each other the praise of humanity. But examine their standard. Who is this man of humanity? It is one who, hearing that a fellow creature has been cruelly and wantonly murdered, *goes away satisfied*, because he himself has sustained no loss by the murder! An exception may be admitted in favour of a few men of enlightened minds: but the remark applies to *the people*—to the bulk of the community, whose prejudices are stated by Lord Seaforth to be *so horribly absurd*, as to resist all measures for remedying this dreadful state of things. But not to detain the reader any longer with reasonings on this subject, let us proceed to the third case communicated by Lord SEAFORTH, and which, if possible, is worse than either of the foregoing.

3. A man of the name of NOWELL, who lives in St. Andrew's parish, had been in the habit of behaving brutally towards his wife, and one day went so far as to lock her up in a room, and confine her in chains. A Negro woman belonging to this man, *touched with compassion for her unfortunate mistress*, undertook privately to release her. NOWELL found it out, and in order to punish her, obliged her to put her tongue through a hole in a board, to which he fastened it on the opposite side with a fork, and left her in that situation for some time. He afterwards cut out her tongue nearly by the root, in consequence of which she almost instantly died. This story, however, it is said, has been told differently; some affirming that the poor creature is still alive, and others that she is dead. If any thing could add to the horror which the shocking barbarity of

Nowell must excite, it is this doubt existing after a lapse of some months,—existing too in the minds of the ATTORNEY GENERAL and the ADVOCATE GENERAL,—as to whether the poor creature was alive or dead. Were there no means of forcing Nowell to produce her? Could no inquest have been instituted to ascertain the truth or falsehood of the reports in circulation? Is the neglect of this obvious duty, by the officers of the crown, to be attributed to the contagious influence of those prejudices, and of that shameless indifference to Negro life, which evidently pervade the people at large? Or is it to be ascribed to this; that the laws have taken from them their constitutional powers? In either case, our colonial system will stand justly chargeable with the violation, not only of every feeling of humanity, but of every acknowledged principle of justice.

It will, doubtless, be argued, that individual instances of cruelty like those which have been cited, are no proofs of *general* inhumanity, any more than the annals of the Old Bailey can be considered as exhibiting a fair view of our national character. There is, however, this very remarkable difference in the two cases, a difference which is fatal to the argument. In this country, when we read of crimes, we read of their being followed by just retribution; by severe and exemplary punishment. In the West Indies, on the contrary, we not only hear of the greatest crimes escaping with impunity, but we find the laws themselves conspiring to shelter criminals from justice: we find the most respectable and enlightened part of the community sanctioning the perpetration even of murder, by their refusal to recognize the commission of it as a felonious act.

But it will be said by some West Indians, “granting the case to be in Barbadoes as you have represented it, it is very unfair to extend the charge of inhumanity to the islands generally. The legis-

latures of all the other islands have by law made the murder of a Slave felony, and have besides provided various salutary regulations for 'the protection of Slaves,' which place them in a situation even of enviable security and comfort." In reply to this reasoning, it will be admitted that the legislatures of most, if not all, the islands, Barbadoes excepted, have made the murder of a Slave felony. It will also be admitted that many regulations have been framed, which, had they been carried into execution, must have produced a beneficial result. But so far is this from having been the case, that it may be indisputably proved, that these regulations have been attended with little or no advantage; nay, that they were never intended to be operative. The proof of these assertions will be found in the papers to which so large a reference has already been made.

In the course of the last year, Earl Camden addressed letters to the governors of the different islands, requiring answers to certain questions respecting the number of Slaves in the islands, the number of Negroes imported and exported, and respecting also the manner in which the different clauses of the acts for the protection of Slaves had been executed.

To these enquiries no answer appears as yet to have been returned by the governors, either of Jamaica or the Bahama Islands. From St. Vincent, Antigua, and Grenada, answers have been promised; but have not yet arrived. Now it is worthy of remark, that had the different Slave Acts of these islands been complied with, no difficulty could have arisen in making the desired returns, because nothing more would have been requisite, except ordering a copy of the public records. The cause of the delay that has taken place, in the case of the islands which have been mentioned, will, perhaps, be best explained by the communications made to

Earl Camden by Governor Prevost, the Governor of Dominica. He states, perhaps truly, "that the Legislature of the Island of Dominica is distinguished by the laws it has passed for the encouragement, protection, and government of Slaves;" but, he adds, "*I am sorry I cannot say that they are as religiously enforced as you could wish; however, the treatment of the Negroes depends less on the temper of the master, whose interest in his Slaves well-being is not always a sufficient check:*" a proposition which directly contradicts the clamorous assertions of the West Indian body.

In a subsequent letter, dated the 17th of January, 1805, Governor Prevost thus writes. "The act of the legislature, intitled, 'An Act for the Encouragement, Protection, and better Government of Slaves,' appears to have been considered, from the day it was passed until this hour, AS A POLITICAL MEASURE, to avert the interference of the mother country in the management of Slaves. Having said this, your Lordship will not be surprised to learn the CLAUSE SEVENTH OF THAT BILL HAS BEEN WHOLLY NEGLECTED."

Here we have honestly disclosed to us the true cause of the enactment of those slave laws which have gained the colonies so much credit for humanity with the mother country, as well as the true cause of their inefficiency. They were enacted to blind the eyes of superficial, but well meaning men in this country, and to furnish a convenient argument to the enemies of abolition. They have been inefficient, because it never was in the contemplation of those who framed them that they should be executed. It may be fairly questioned, whether a single Slave in the Island of Dominica knew of those protecting clauses which were so loudly boasted of in this country.

The third and fourth clauses of the same act require, under pecuniary penalties, that the Slaves

should be convened every Sunday for divine worship, and that they should be exhorted to be baptized, and when of mature age to form christian marriages: and the reason assigned for the enactment is, that "a knowledge of the doctrines, and a due attention to the exercise of the duties, of the Christian Religion, would tend to improve the morals, and to advance the temporal and eternal happiness, of the Slaves." The reader, however, will see what an impious mockery all this parade of legislation has been, when he learns from Governor Prevost that these clauses "are not carried into effect," and that no penalties have been levied for non-compliance with their provisions. The Rev. JOHN AUDAIN, Rector of St. George's, thus writes on the subject. "A very few *even* of the free-coloured people marry; and not one slave since I have been here. Why they do not I readily conceive, particularly the Slaves. *Their owners do NOT EXHORT them to it.*" Yet the law requires the owners to *exhort them* to it, and though it is notorious that that law has, in no one instance, been complied with; it is equally notorious, that its infraction has, in no one instance, been punished by enforcing the penalty.

These facts sufficiently demonstrate, that the laws for the protection of the Slaves are perfectly nugatory, and do, in no degree, tend to alleviate the rigours of their unhappy condition; or to place them on a better footing as to "protection" in the other islands than that on which they stand even in Barbadoes.

Eighteen years have now passed since the Slave Trade question was first agitated in this country, and since West Indians have been holding out promises of ameliorating the condition of their Slaves. These promises it appears, have proved altogether delusive, and so they will continue until Parliament shall abolish the Slave Trade, and thus *oblige* West Indians to reform their horrid system.